

ALBUMS YOU CANNOT BREAK UP



ELBOW: The Seldom Seen Kid

Guy Garvey and co's Mercury Prize-winning dedication to a departed friend moves from the pain of loss to some kind of redemption in uplifting modern anthem "One Day Like This". The journey is its own reward.



RADIOHEAD: OK Computer

Radiohead spent a fortnight working out the track-listing alone. Proof if it were needed that this towering paean to suburban ennui and the sickness of modern life is meant to be heard in full.



SPIRITUALIZED: Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space

A conceptual piece from its pill-packet packaging to its seamless narcotic drift, it's a symphonic space odyssey that cosmic casualty Jason Pierce has often performed in its entirety.

L.P.R.I.P

Is the album dead and buried?

BY MATTHEW HORTON

In March this year, prog rock behemoths Pink Floyd won their battle to prevent EMI from cutting up their albums and selling them as piecemeal downloads, effectively reinforcing the idea of the album as coherent entity, rather than a collection of disparate tracks.

On the surface, they were just emphasising the same contract that famously stopped EMI from releasing Floyd singles back in the vinyl days. But in the current climate, Floyd's latter-day victory has extra resonance.

In recent years the conceptual full-length piece has become an endangered species, now that downloads mean we can take music any way we want it. The figures speak for themselves. In the UK in 2009, overall album sales dipped by 3.5 percent to 128.9m units – that's the fifth successive year they've dropped. At the same time, the downloads element of that figure rose to 16.1m, an incredible 56 percent hike. So what do we take from this? There's still an appetite for the long-player, evidently, but the digital format is heir-apparent. And it's changing the way we consume music; we're less patient, less tolerant of the needless instrumental or the dreaded hip hop "skit".

After all, what do you do when your iPod's full? Do you delete that weighty Rolling Stones best of or pare down the ropey Snow Patrol album to the two half-decent tracks? In short, the singles. Take a scythe to your mp3s and you could be left with a greatest hits of pop: no filler, no earnest experiments you think you ought to like; just the golden nuggets. It would feel like a return to the early '60s, where singles held sway, before The Beatles found their creative well could support full-length albums. Only the most tediously pedantic, fluffy-bearded Radiohead fan wouldn't want that. Wouldn't they?

"The digital age is here, and if punk couldn't kill off the dinosaurs, perhaps the mouse button will"

Yes and no. To return to those 2009 figures, the lion's share of sales were taken by Susan Boyle's hotchpotch of standards geared at a quick Christmas sales fix, Lady GaGa's *The Fame* and *The Fame Monster* packed with singles and a few will-this-do?s and Black Eyed Peas' ungodly collection of party bangers and identikit throwaways, *The E.N.D.*. The end indeed: none of these million-sellers suggest a cohesive, conceptual masterpiece it would be sacrilege to carve up.

But there's still a healthy quorum of album fanatics out there. Witness the growing number of bands hawking their past around, playing classic albums in their entirety. A trend that kicked off when Arthur Lee's *Love* toured *Forever Changes* a decade ago has snowballed into an industry, with promoters ATP running their Don't Look Back series of gigs, Lloyd Cole and the Commotions reforming to play *Rattlesnakes* and Primal Scream wheeling out *Screamadelica* later this year. There even appeared to be an audience for The Wonder Stuff's *Hup*, which attempted to justify a spurious "classic" status on the road this April. These heritage acts won't let the album die. It's their cash cow.

So Pink Floyd's victory is just the latest example of the old guard kicking against the forces of change. The Beatles also made their sustained case for the purity of the album in 2009 by re-mastering their entire back catalogue (come on, you wanted the Ringo songs to stay as much as he did), while Paul Weller's new album *Wake Up The Nation* is a sop to those wary of listening to an LP in full. Its 16 tracks zip by in under 40 minutes, leaving you little time to get to the skip button. Yet more than ever, these artists are music's King Canutes, stemming the tide against hopeless odds. The digital age is here, and if punk couldn't kill off the dinosaurs, perhaps that fearsome mouse button will. It's a pity, sure, but as you sit there cherrypicking your favourite tracks from the latest Vampire Weekend album, be aware you're just another brick in the wall. **2**





DJs Jade and Diamond Setter: the future's so bright even tinted windows aren't enough

WANT TO PARTY LIKE A ROCKSTAR?

JOY OF DECKS

Meet the man who provides Beirut's soundtrack

BY GEORGINA WILSON-POWELL

It's sad... the only independent music shop in town and it's shutting down," says DJ Jade, one of Beirut's biggest players in the music scene. He's a man of many talents: DJ, promoter, musician, club owner, singer and one half of a production duo (with his friend Diamond Setter). Their work includes composing music for adverts, film scores and remixing Arabic pop singers.

We're in La CD-Thèque and we're having a *High Fidelity* moment. Jade used to work here, eight years ago, and in the midst of buying up armfuls of discounted CDs, he's still advising friends and random customers on what to buy, what to look for. Whilst recommending German label ECM to me, we talk music.

"I'm setting up Kashmeer, a lounge style bar, where we can play all the records I can't play at The Basement. Old jazz, chilled out soundscapes, anything we feel like," he says from behind a stack of CDs, half as tall as he is. Jade has a habit of creating mix CDs for everything he does, a kickback from his party days. Kashmeer's opening invite is one such mix CD, that includes tracks from Moloko, Jamie Lidell, Gossip and Pink Floyd.

"We're going to open in the spring, I've already got the decks set up," he adds. "Beirut doesn't have anywhere where you can chill, talk and listen to music without dancing."

One of the most popular places to go and do just that is his own club. The Basement is Jade's home from home, an industrial Gothic sub-level space (hence the name), where the city's party crowd come to dance. His weekly residency sits within an electro/techno remit, but visiting DJs also mix it up with other monthly nights. Set up on high above the dancefloor, the DJ booth brings to mind the Faithless track, "God is a DJ".

A well known face about town in Beirut, Jade has always been a bit of a Pied Piper. Whilst working at La CD-Thèque in 2002, after

"DJ Jade is a product of Beirut's history and provides its soundtrack"

and lyrics. He also started DJing at parties, organising raves and then benefit concerts to help the 2006 war relief effort, enlisting international DJs to help. Then, in 2005, he opened The Basement and became the soundtrack to life in Beirut when he started a weekly radio show.

The next day we meet at his recording studio where Jade and Diamond Setter are both downloading tracks for their respective sets that night. One ear muffled with headphones, the other clamped to his BlackBerry, Jade is also busily fielding calls from people interested in their remix and production work. Whilst I'm there a famous rock band asks them to submit a remix for a new album. There's a

spell living in Montreal, he was the lead singer of Blend, one of Beirut's first popular rock bands, and a group which successfully combined Arabic strings with Western beats

HERE'S WHERE IN BEIRUT

THE BASEMENT

AKA Jade's house for the afterhours. Harsh but chic, intimate but not cosy, The Basement encourages dancing on tables, chairs, ledges and goes out of its way to prove its motto "Electro is Dead" is a little premature.

B018

You can literally raise the roof at one of Beirut's institutions. Well, not you personally, but the roof does retract and disappear. If that doesn't make you gasp, perhaps one of the coffin seats will, or the fact it was designed by Bernard Khoury.

BARTHREESIXTY

Sitting on top of the new Le Gray hotel, this rooftop, circular bar does what it says on the door - you can see across the whole of the city.

BRUT

A new player in Beirut's club scene, Brut sticks to what it does well - house music. Not underground (or overground for that matter) but the music's set to 11 from 11pm every night of the week. Be ready to dance.

DESSAU LIQUOR GARAGE

Brilliantly named little spot that tries to emulate Berlin 100 years ago. Decadently dishevelled, it's all about the moves, the music and the moonshine in here. The best antidote to Dubai you could wish for.

hearty discussion whether they're being invited because of a hankering for an Arabic sound, but the scope of their production work would suggest otherwise.

That night in the club, Jade watches his home fill up with the people who make his musical dreams a reality and it feels like a family affair. The music man is completely interwoven into Beirut's cultural scene; he's a product of its history but is also providing the soundtrack for its future. ☺